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Were tribal govts adequately consulted for Powertech mine?

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RAPID CITY (AP) - A licensing board of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission tasked with approving a South Dakota uranium mine questioned expert witnesses Tuesday to determine whether commission staff members adequately consulted Native Americans and met legal requirements for protecting historical and cultural resources before signing off on the mine.

The Atomic Safety and Licensing Board held the first of its three-day hearings in Rapid City in a ballroom of the historic Hotel Alex Johnson that has been transformed into a federal courtroom for the week.

Tuesday's hearings focused primarily on two contentions from the Oglala Sioux Tribe and a group of concerned parties, or "consolidated intervenors."

Members of the tribe are challenging a Nuclear Regulatory Commission license granted to Powertech Uranium Corp. for its Dewey-Burdock in situ recovery uranium mine proposed for the Southern Black Hills. They're challenging on the grounds that tribal governments were not adequately consulted in cultural and historical surveys performed on the proposed site and sufficient studies weren't performed to ensure cultural artifacts are preserved as required by law.

The tribe and the intervenors want previous decisions allowing for a Powertech license to be remanded. They also seek more intensive environmental studies to be done before mining can begin.

Jeff Parsons, one of the attorneys for the Oglala Sioux Tribe, said the tribe was working with NRC staffers but that the commission went ahead without them.

"(The tribes) wanted a more active role," he said. "They wanted it done in a way that incorporated all the tribes that had an interest. And they were working toward that and were intent on bridging that gap."

He said the Oglala Sioux Tribe is opposed to the uranium mine as a whole but wants to make sure its historical and cultural artifacts are protected if the project moves forward. Parsons added that while the planned mining method is considered less destructive than open pit mining "that doesn't mean that it's not going to impact cultural resources."

The board began to discuss Tuesday whether the mining company must divulge hydrological data sought by opponents - Powertech does not believe it is relevant to the NRC permit process - but ran out of time. Board members will resume that discussion Wednesday, while also covering other issues raised by opponents who say the mine could pollute or drain the region's aquifers.

<http://www.indianz.com/News/2014/014807.asp>

Native Sun News: Oglala Sioux Tribe gears up for uranium battle

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By Talli Nauman

Native Sun News

Health & Environment Editor

RAPID CITY - As the Oglala Sioux Tribe prepared to testify against proposed foreign uranium mining and milling in Black Hills treaty territory,